



Russell Lee

Russell Lee was born in 1905 in Ottawa, Illinois. After a childhood that included his parents' divorce and his mother's death, he enrolled at Culver Military Academy in Indiana and later graduated from Lehigh University in Pennsylvania with a degree in chemical engineering. He returned to Illinois, and in 1927 he married Doris Emrick. By 1929 he had grown bored with his career and moved to an artist's community in Woodstock, NY, to pursue painting. After several unsatisfying years of painting landscapes and portraits, Lee purchased his first camera, which he initially intended to use to help with his painting and draftsmanship. He quickly became interested in photographing the effects of the Depression, starting locally with photographs of people forced to sell their personal belongings, and working his way to New York City and to Pennsylvania coalmines. He joined the Resettlement Agency in 1936 and worked all over the United States. He was best known for his photographic series, including those in San Augustine, Texas and Pie Town, New Mexico. In 1939 he and Doris divorced, and later that year he met and later married Jean Smith, a Dallas journalist. On December 7, 1941, the couple was in California, and after the bombing of Pearl Harbor they immediately telegraphed Stryker for instructions. After photographing newsboys with the latest editions of the local newspapers, the Lees went to Salinas, where they were to do a series of photographs about agricultural products that would be needed for the war. In April 1942, Lee joined Dorothea Lange and other photographers in documenting the internment of Japanese Americans. Later that year Lee joined the Overseas Technical Unit of the Air Force Transport Command, where he photographed routes flown by the ATC. After his service during the war, Lee continued to work for Stryker at Standard Oil. After moving to Austin, Texas in 1947, he became the first instructor of photography at the University of Texas in 1965. Lee died in 1986.

Russell Lee Bibliography

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Russell Lee Websites

A Guide to the Russell Lee Photograph Collection

<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/taro/utcah/00123/cah-00123.html>

The Handbook of Texas Online

<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/LL/fle71.html>

Lee Gallery

<http://www.leegallery.com/prejune.html>

Wittliff Gallery of Southwestern & Mexican Photography, Texas State University San Marcos :
Russell Lee Collection:

<http://www.library.swt.edu/swwc/wg/exhibits/rlee>